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# Legislative smoking ban irks patrons

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Western News Reporter

Some diners contacted Monday reacted angrily to an impending ban on smoking in restaurants across Montana, but restaurant owners in Libby expressed resignation or agreement with the change.

The Legislature voted April 7 to prohibit smoking in public buildings beginning Oct. 1. The bill, which Gov. Brian Schweitzer said he will sign into law, applies to restaurants, stores and offices as well as public and private office buildings.

The compromise legislation will extend to bars starting in October 2009.

Several customers lit up cigarettes before or after dinner Monday evening at Henry's Restaurant. One of them, Theresa Talbott, didn't mince words about the law.

"I think it's Gestapo," she said, relaxing in a corner booth with a cigarette. "They're dictating to business owners who they can have as customers."

"We're getting more communist than Russia was. Next they're going to start on fat people."

Another customer at Henry's, John Loyd, called it a governmental foot-in-the-door.

"It's just another form of government control," he said. "I've smoked since I was 7 and I'm not going to quit. I don't go to non-smoking restaurants now."

His wife, Linda, a non-smoker, sat across the table from Loyd while they waited for dinner. She said he smokes

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outside at home, and tries to keep his smoke from drifting toward her or others in a restaurant.

"He's always considerate of other people," Linda Loyd said.

Judy Cummings, co-owner of Henry's, shrugged off any possible economic effects of the new law. She hopes long-time customers such as the Loyds continue to show up, but said only time will tell.

"We've decided to go all non-smoking as of May 1 just to get everybody ready," Cummings said. "I think it's positive. It was coming no matter what people wanted."

Henry's has had a non-smoking room for about three years, she said. Occasionally there have been complaints by non-smokers because they must walk through smoke to reach the room, Cummings said, although non-smokers sometimes choose to sit in the smoking area.

The executive director of Libby Community Interagencies Inc. of the Lincoln County Tobacco Prevention Program expressed happiness that such a bill has passed after years of attempts.

"We are so excited about it," said Barb Guthneck.

"Libby Community Interagencies sees strong health benefits for Lincoln County and the state as a whole," said LCI board member Diane Keck, a volunteer in the clean air movement.

She noted the bill's text echoes previous comments from

health officials about second-hand smoke's role in causing illnesses such as heart disease, stroke, respiratory disease and lung cancer.

The EPA has indicated that secondhand smoke can't be reduced to safe levels by ventilation, Keck said, because air cleaners filter only particulate matters and odors in smoke but do not eliminate known toxins.

"I particularly care about the fact that those in Lincoln County who are already suffering from respiratory illnesses will have clean air to breathe in all public buildings," Keck said.

Monday night at Marcia's, customer Jeaninne Snyder asked a man sitting next to her at the counter if he minded whether she smoked. He said he didn't, so she lit up.

"I respect non-smokers," Snyder said. "I think it works as long as smoking and non-smoking areas are separated. I do believe it (the ban) will take businesses down because there are a lot of people who like to go out to drink coffee and smoke cigarettes."

Barbara Monheiser, co-owner of Beck's Montana Café, said they've been a non-smoking facility since March 1, 2004. The motivation?

"We were remodeling and didn't want to stink it up," Monheiser said.

She said a few customers complained after the change, vowing to eat at restaurants that allowed smoking.

"I said, 'Good luck,'" Monheiser said, referring to the

dwindling number of such outlets.

Bruce Mohr, co-owner of the Red Dog Saloon, said he found a totally non-smoking approach to have economic benefits.

The establishment on Pipe Creek Road used to hold "non-smoking nights" on Wednesdays and Thursdays for about three years, Mohr said, but went completely non-smoking last Thanksgiving. Business has never been better.

He said some restaurants might feel a financial loss after the change, depending on the clientele.

"It's going to depend on the style of their business," he said.

Meanwhile, the change affecting bars can't come too soon for Emily Enger, a part-time server at the Pastime Lounge.

"I hate it," she said of smoky air that gives her a headache on busy nights. "If I didn't need the money so badly and the tips weren't so good I wouldn't have this job because of the smoke."